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ABSTRACT

Stockton State College, New Jersey, recognizes that the teaching of writing is not the responsibility of the English department alone, but of the entire college faculty. Stockton's writing across the curriculum project is designed to give all faculty members general theoretical information and practical training in writing instruction and the relation between writing and learning. Stockton's basic writing courses are staffed with volunteer faculty members from across the college. These "rotating faculty" go through three stages of training. In the first stage, faculty members are given a set of reading materials that discuss the nature and function of writing and various writing pedagogies. In the second stage, they participate in a one-day workshop in which they complete a holistic exercise that involves reading papers and ranking them by the overall quality of writing. The holistic scoring used in the workshop session provides the "rotating faculty" with an understanding of the elements of good writing. The third stage of training occurs in another one-day workshop the week before school begins, during which the faculty members must write under the same circumstances that students often must write under. Strategies for grading are also discussed. Support services for the "rotating faculty" include a skills center and designated consultants from the core writing faculty. (HTH)

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Tapping Non-English Faculty Resources in the Literacy Crusade

Teaching college students to write clearly has become a cottage industry. In response to extensive publicity regarding the inadequacies of the average college student's literacy skills, many institutions have devised elaborate plans, even devoted entire divisions, to the basic skills problem. Stockton State College has tried to call a halt to shrill complaints about the writing of college students. Rather than lamenting the extent of the problem and wallowing in despair, Stockton's faculty has joined a crusade to personally assist students in their struggle to literacy. Faculty from a multitude of disciplines--from dance to chemistry, from computer science to calculus-- volunteer to make writing an integral part of their courses. Students understand they must write adequately to pass these courses. Faculty encourage, coax, and cajole students to develop writing skills. The institution provides faculty support through training programs and students support through a Skills Lab staffed with peer tutors. Faculty and students are putting forth more effort, spending more time, expending more energy.

Stockton faculty recognize that the teaching of writing is not the responsibility of the English department alone. Rather, the teaching of writing is a shared faculty responsibility. Such an assertion hinges on two observations. First, languages--especially the particular use of language called writing--is what <u>all</u> instruction

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has in common. We all use language as we teach. We are, in fact, language teachers in the sense that each discipline uses a particular language to represent a way of viewing the world. Thus, attention to language--especially writing, the medium through which most knowledge is communicated--is a shared faculty responsibility. Second, the crusade to enrich the use of writing throughout the institution, what Stockton and many other institutions call the Writing Across the Curriculum movement, responds to some frequently overlooked research by Albert Ketzhaber in the early 1960's. Themes, Theories and Therapies: The Teaching of Writing in College (NY: McGraw-Hill, 1963) presents an analysis of the relation of the English writing requirement to the whole Darmouth College Curriculum. His findings describe the significance of the "message" institutions send through such requirements. He found that the English sequence, regardless of teaching students how to think, read and write, did convince freshmen that writing was important--but only for a little while and in particular courses. Thus, samples collected in subsequent courses indicated that students were writing less proficiently than before the required English courses. Kitzhaber calls this "retrogression." An English requirement like the freshman composition courses we require our students to take may teach students how to manipulate language, but the instruction is wasted unless reinforced by institution-wide demands for consistent performance at a level of proficiency. Thus, assigning the English department the sole responsibility for student writing proficiency promises failure.

One means of beginning the process of mobilizing an entire faculty's interest and concern is for English departments or writing

specialists to assume a high profile in advertising the futility of pidgeon-holing responsibility. In doing so at Stockton we have involved the entire college in a Literacy Crusade. Although we may not be able to agree upon a precise definition, we all know what literacy means. It is the ability to read and write. More specifically, literacy is the integration of thinking, reading and writing skills. Literacy, in college, is the ability to learn, not in the sense of mastering a particular content, but mastering the process of learning a content--any content. This literacy far exceeds that measured on any basic skills test. This literacy prepares our students for life in a highly technological world where particular contents are unstable, where one technology can appear, predominate, and become obsolete in a matter of years. And this level of literacy can result only from well articulated institution-wide commitment by the faculty. This literacy is the goal of the Writing Across the Curriculum movement.

What I have found at Stockton State College is that once non-English faculty recognize their dependence on language, the necessity for institution-wide involvement, individual opportunities for involvement, and the ultimate goal--advanced literacy--they adopt a near religious fervor. They become crusaders.

At Stockton the crusade includes an extensive Writing Across the Curriculum project designed to give all faculty general theoretical information and practical training in the instructional uses of writing and the powerful relation between writing and learning. In addition, we have developed an intensive training program designed

to enable non-English faculty to teach basic writing courses in our competency based Basic Skills Program. We call these volunteers "rotating faculty." The balance of this paper will describe the training program for rotating faculty. Both practical and theoretical issues will receive attention. The importance of developing coherent training and support systems to support rotating faculty will be emphasized.

Rotating Faculty Teaching Basic Writing

The basic writing courses at Stockton are not staffed by over-worked skills faculty, underpaid adjuncts, inexperienced teaching assistants, or discipline "retreads." We staff the courses with volunteers from across the college. Calculus, computer science, Chaucer instructors all willingly join in. These faculty are trained by a small core of skills specialists and supported by a Skills Center staffed with peer tutors. After training, and with support, rotating faculty teach in the program on a semester by semester basis. A volunteer contributes a course every year or so on a rotating basis. Both junior and senior faculty participate in the program. The concept depends on the idea that faculty members are professional writers, having generally earned their credentials through research and writing. Our training program raises these skills to consciousness and developes them so they can be channeled for instruction. The keystone to the plan is that using rotating faculty shows students that writing is fundamental to every discipline. In addition, participating faculty return to discipline courses with a practical understanding of writing and how to use it more effectively. Slowly, ever so slowly, the entire faculty becomes writing instructors.

More important, students are writing papers, and rewriting papers, every semester, sometimes in two or three different courses.

The program preparing rotating faculty to teach basic writing involves three stages of training. The first includes a set of reading materials discussing the nature and function of writing, the relation between writing and learning, and various writing pedagogies. In addition to articles and excerpts from books, a short annotated bibliography lists specialized articles and texts available in a teachers' library in the Skills Center. The texts in the teachers' library are selected for their accessibility to non-specialists and for their practicality. The readings must be economical--they must be obviously helpful to volunteers trying to solve the immediate problem of preparing to teach a basic writing class. In addition, the readings must represent the philosophy of the program. Thus an article dealing with the relations between writing and learning rather than the teaching of writing per se reflects basic program direction. The readings emphasize the importance of peer feedback when composing. They emphasize invention and extending the composing process. The readings illustrate the importance of developing an authentic voice in writing. They introduce rotating faculty to writing as a holistic skill rather than a collection of independently manipulated discrete skills. They also introduce rotating faculty to a variety of ways of teaching writing emphasizing the need to build a course around their own teaching style.

The second stage of training involves a one day workshop just after spring semester's end. Volunteers recieve a $50.00 honorarium for participation in workshops. The payment is an explicit symbol of

institutional support for the program. These workshops indoctrinate volunteers to the purpose and procedures of the course. Part of the day is spend in a holistic reading exercise reading papers for a general impression and ranking them by overall quality of the writing. Holistic scoring is a controlled process through which groups of readers reach concensus on the relative merits of large numbers of papers. Generally used as technique for scoring placement essays, holistic scoring used in a workshop session provides an easy way to begin discussing student writing. In discussion we assign values to various elements of writing including content, structure, and mechanics. Discussing these elements helps rotating faculty develop a working vocabulary. They begin to understand coherence, for example, not as an abstraction, but as a series of linking operations in writing. As they understand the linking, volunteers begin to develop strategies for helping students write coherently.

Discussion of the elements of writing is purposefully non-directive. Values are not imposed. Since each instructor emphasizes a different element, all become aware of the incredible range of values. From this discussion we make the point that not any single fault characterizes weak writing. We develop a holistic view of good writing. Finally we generate a list of characteristics of good writing and form these into objectives for the course. In addition to the objectives, we have a set of goals. The goals further emphasize the philosophy of the program, especially the relation between writing and learning and the importance of peer interaction. These goals also include wanting students to feel comfortable and confident

when writing and making them aware of the variety of functions writing can have. We teach writing for use throughout life, not just for school.

The afternoon of this workshop day is devoted to planning programs to realize the goals established in the morning. We distribute a set of syllabi previously used by core or rotating faculty. The syllabi include not only a schedule for the course but also the mechanics of the course including policies on attendance, late papers, supplemental skills lab requirements--the whole range of instructional concerns. The discussion of syllabi illustrates that teaching writing is largely a matter of style. Volunteers are encouraged to shape their syllabus and take advantage of their own style. The syllabus shows how the style of an instructor fits itself into the philosophy of the program and the objectives of the course.

Syllabus sharing takes the greater part of the afternoon. Near the end we discuss texts. Reflecting our premise that each instructor is best capable of determining how common objectives will be met, we do not use a standard text. After a range of texts and purposes of the texts are discussed, we move to the teachers' library where we have a state of the art collection of composition texts, workbooks, rhetorics, and readers. Rotating faculty leave this session with a few texts to work through before making a final choice. Most important, they leave the teachers' library knowing it is a source of supplemental ideas and exercises for teaching particular skills. The day ends with two charges to participants. First, they must choose and order a text. Second, they are charged with drafting a syllabus. These syllabi become the first agenda item for the

follow-up workshops in the fall.

The third stage of training occurs in a one-day workshop the week before school begins. Five activities prepare the volunteers for their courses. First, faculty are made to write under pressure, in an area for which they have not been academically prepared, in a less than comfortable place, for a purpose whose value they can't absolutely determine. Finally, they must share their writing with strangers. In other words, we try to make faculty feel like students. Our purpose here is to remind faculty that basic writers are individuals, individuals with myriad anxieties and varieties of strengths and weaknesses. The volunteers have already designed their syllabi and their courses have a structure. The writing exercise reminds them that the courses cannot be so rigid that individual writers are excluded.

After the writing exercise, our second activity takes us to nuts and bolts issues that often mean the difference between success and failure. We review and critique the provisional syllabi designed during the summer. Third and more important, we discuss the support services offered rotating faculty. These include a Skills Center testing and diagnosis service, but more important, extensive one-on-one peer tutoring. Rotating faculty often find the Skills Center tutorial assistance the difference between success and failure for their weakest students. We discuss the role the Skills Center can play as a supplement to classroom instruction. We also discuss another support service, the mentor system. Each rotating faculty member designates one of the core faculty as chief consultant during the semester. The mentor's job is to maintain close contact with rotating faculty checking how the course is going and helping solve

any problems that may arise. The mentor system is a formal problem solving network. Rotating faculty find having one core faculty person to trust with problems, insights, or complaints very helpful.

We offer one more support service--a pre/posttest--designed to give rotating faculty information on student progress and a measure of their level of competence. The samples are collected and blind scored by a panel of readers. The results are reported to each instructor by roster showing pretest score, posttest score and change. Instructors are warned to use these scores in an adivsory fashion. They know what score signals competence but they also know the inherent limitations of a holistically scored writing sample. If performance on the posttest contradicts a student's performance throughout the semester, faculty are instructed to trust their own judgement. The pre/posttest evaluation serves to foster confidence in evaluation or to provide a second professional opinion in cases of genuine doubt.

The discussion of support services completes the morning's activities. The afternoon includes two activities. The first borrowed from the Bay Area Writing Project. Faculty share something that works. Core writing faculty generally describe particular techniques they use to introduce students to important writing concepts. During this session we also discuss strategies for paper evaluation including conference teaching and marginal notation. Rotating faculty need to see a variety of paper grading styles. They must understand that paper grading has instructional implications. One or two paragraph precis of these exercises and paper evaluation strategies are collected in a file kept in the teachers' library. The file is

available to all. So much of all training is a process of making rotating faculty aware of resources and how to take advantage of them. These resources are within themselves, their colleagues, and the institution.

Finally, each veteran instructor reports one failure encountered while teaching the course. Around the table participants discuss possible strategies for dealing with such problems. The purpose of discussing failures is to bring us back to the reality of the classroom after the heights reached as we shared successful lessons. Our volunteers must leave with a balance of enthusiasm and realism. Equipped with the lessons gained during these training workshops, and supported by their mentors, the Skills Center testing/tutorial services and each other, the rotating faculty are as prepared as we can make them to confront their basic writers.

What makes Stockton's writing program work well? Faculty enthusiasm. Neither the Writing Across the Curriculum project nor the rotating faculty program would work if faculty did not participate. Most Stockton faculty members are wedded to the notion that teaching excellence should exceed mere rhetoric--that they must work harder, and that teaching writing is vital to their mission. And it is the responsibility of the writing program to cultivate whole faculty interest and meet their training and support needs. Finally, the institution must support these crusaders in their seemingly endless task.

Idealism bathed in sweat...It may work.